

# GEOS INSTITUTE

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## **National Forest Planning Rules: Many Good Concepts, But Vulnerable to Flawed Execution and Weakened Wildlife Safeguards**

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*Washington D.C. and Ashland, OR* - The USDA Forest Service unveiled its proposed National Forest Planning Rule yesterday that is intended to establish a new national framework for land management plans governing 193 million acres of some of the most ecologically valuable lands and waters in the nation. The proposed planning rule provides guidance on what the agency intends to emphasize on the National Forest System; however, it leaves this mostly open to the discretion of local agency officials.

According to Randi Spivak, Vice President of Government Affairs of the Geos Institute ([www.geosinstitute.org](http://www.geosinstitute.org)), "The Forest Service got many of the concepts right in the draft rule – like recognizing the critical importance of national forests to drinking water that supplies over half of the water in the West. But the proposed rule leaves too much discretion to local officials rather than requiring enforceable national standards".

While the agency also emphasized sound science in the planning rule, the Geos Institute is concerned as to whether this will be put into practice. "The rule does not require use of the sound science in planning, local officials would only have to document that science was considered," said Dominick DellaSala, Chief Scientist and President of the Geos Institute.

In addition to aptly noting the importance of fish and wildlife, water, the need to address climate change was also recognized by the agency.

“The agency needs to do more if it is going to safeguard clean water, healthy fish and wildlife populations, and the nation’s last old growth forests as these will only become even more important in an era of climate change,” said DellaSala. The Geos Institute looks forward to working with the Forest Service over the next 90 days to improve the rule.

Publication of the proposed planning rule in the Federal Register will kick off a 90-day public comment period, ending May 16. The Forest Service will use comments to develop a final rule. The proposed rule, meeting information, and additional information can be found at [www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule](http://www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule).